

VZCZCXRO7745
PP RUEHDE
DE RUEHAD #0111/01 0290900
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 290900Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2079
INFO RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 8145

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000111

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DRL/NESCA, NEA/ARP, G/TIP, AND NEA/PI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2019
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KTIP](#) [KMPI](#) [AE](#)
SUBJ: EMIRATES HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION IN DISARRAY

REFS: A) 07 ABU DHABI 2002, B) 08 ABU DHABI 1037, C) 08 ABU DHABI 1022, D) 08 ABU DHABI 1440

Classified by Ambassador Richard Olson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Long-time Mission contact and former Secretary General of the Emirates Human Rights Association (EHRA), Dr. Mohammed Ghubash (please protect), recounted for Emboff January 5 an NGO factionalized and in disarray after he and his previous board were pressed to resign, presumably by UAEG state security. According to Ghubash, the Association's critical reports on the labor situation in UAE and past cooperation with MEPI led to accusations of "treason" and being "tools of a foreign government." Ghubash now leads a private EHRA faction which hopes to regain control of the Association, through elections, later this year. Ghubash cited EHRA priority areas of focus as calling attention to poor prison conditions in the UAE, press freedom, and trafficking-in-persons (TIP). The group hopes to cooperate with MEPI but in a confidential manner for the time-being. End Summary.

EHRA FACTIONALIZED, INFILTRATED BY STATE SECURITY

¶2. (C) In a January 5 meeting with Emboff, Dr. Mohammed Ghubash, former long-time Secretary General of the Emirates Human Rights Association (EHRA), a Dubai-based human rights NGO, depicted an Association in disarray, outlining UAEG harassment, and his eviction from the Association. Ghubash told Emboff that in late 2007 and early 2008, the EHRA, of which he was a senior board member at the time, had been critical of the UAEG on certain labor issues, publishing reports that received prominent media attention. At around the same time, an EHRA Board member planned to travel to the U.S. on a MEPI-sponsored exchange program. According to Ghubash, the Board member was harassed and stopped at the airport (ref A); Ghubash said that officials of the UAEG then accused him and the Board of EHRA of "treason" and being a "tool of foreign governments."

¶3. (C) According to Ghubash, he was blackballed and forced to resign his Association position. Since then, the EHRA has factionalized. Ghubash said the existing official Board had been clearly infiltrated by state security agents (ref B); while another faction, that he headed, met privately and was planning for new board elections in late 2009. He said the EHRA had not issued an annual report in 2008 because of the turmoil and the Association was essentially "in conflict and in limbo," as he described it.

MEPI GRANTS: "DANGEROUS"

¶4. (SBU) Ghubash explained to Emboff that the EHRA was mostly self-funded; however, the Association receives an annual grant from the UAEG Ministry of Social Affairs of 50,000 AED (approximately 13,500 USD) and per UAE law, must submit an annual report to the Ministry. EHRA is allowed, however, to raise funds through publications and conferences. EHRA currently has 120 members. Ghubash noted the EHRA was working with the University of California-Berkeley Law School, Human Rights Studies Program; he said the UAEG had given a \$200,000 USD grant to the law school in 2008.

15. (C) In terms of cooperation with the USG, Ghubash lauded the DOS annual Human Rights Report and cooperation with Embassy Abu Dhabi which had led to some resolution on the issue of stateless persons in the UAE. (However, in other conversations with PolOff, he has decried the inadequacy of the solutions in comparison to the scale of the problem. It remains his contention that efforts to assimilate the stateless into Emirati society present a veneer of inclusivity to the outside world but in fact have more sinister implications due to a tribal component to the registration process; those with tribal affiliations not associated with indigenous Emirati clans, non-Arabs, and illegal immigrants, are excluded [ref C].) Ghubash also told Emboff that he had high respect for the work that MEPI does in the region but that taking a grant from a USG entity would currently be "dangerous." (Comment: we interpret "dangerous" to mean potentially drawing unwanted attention from security services rather than physical danger. End comment.) He said cooperation with MEPI was welcome but would have to be very confidential.

ALLEGATIONS OF MENTALLY RETARDED,
STATELESS IN UAE PRISONS

16. (C) Ghubash said he would like the USG and other foreign governments to look at the issue of prison conditions in the UAE, which he claimed were "atrocious." According to Ghubash, there are many mentally-retarded individuals being held in UAE prisons, as well as stateless Palestinians who had served their respective prison terms but had no state to which they could be deported. He asked if the USG could fund an international group to do a study on the prisons in light of what he called terrible indifference to the plight of prisoners. If it were difficult to do this bilaterally he asked if the USG could consider a regional (Gulf-wide) study, as he

ABU DHABI 00000111 002 OF 002

said there were similar conditions in other Gulf states. He said that DOS-sponsored regional programs on press freedom, for example, had been extremely helpful, citing liberalization of the Press in Jordan as a result.

TIP: AN ONGOING PROBLEM

17. (SBU) Ghubash noted that TIP was a significant ongoing problem in the UAE, due largely to the large foreign worker population, but that the UAEG was taking some positive steps to address it. He referenced a recent United States PBS television special on TIP in Dubai which had received attention in government circles.

BLOGS HELP RECRUITMENT

18. (C) Ghubash told Emboff that blogging and citizen journalism were indeed growing in the UAE, and that he was using blogs to help recruit members to his EHRA faction. He hoped that his faction would "re-take control" of the Association later this year; if not, he said, he may consider forming another association, although he could be hindered by UAEG entities. Ghubash wrapped up the discussion by stating that in the UAE, "the people in power are scared." When subsequently pressed for an explanation by PolOff, he claimed that the regime feared that "Islamist fundamentalists" were actively infiltrating local society and sowing seeds of discontent.

19. (C) Comment: Ghubash is a dedicated humanitarian and supporter of the stateless and the less fortunate. EHRA's focus on these groups, including prisoners, has been moderately productive in drawing attention to their very real plights. The group has not advocated strongly for individual political freedoms, nor agitated for broad societal reforms, however, and represents a rather benign activism. Although the EHRA presents itself as independent, its membership historically involves "volunteers" either overtly or loosely affiliated with the UAEG (ref D). If indeed the UAEG is intimidated enough by the Association's efforts to impede its work, such interference (by a UAEG which largely determines the Association's operational parameters) represents a rather low threshold of tolerance for social activism. End comment.

